Paul Harvey Memorial Service
March 7, 2009

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It used to be the custom in England to ring the church bell when a member of the parish died. It was the custom John Donne, the great poet and Dean of St. Paul's, had in mind when he wrote,

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a piece of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. . . . Any man's death diminishes me . . . and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

The world is a smaller place this morning. Chicago is the less. The nation is the less. The world of broadcast journalism is the less. Each of us is diminished by the death of Paul Harvey. For decades Paul Harvey was a consistent presence in life, bringing us the news. The tenor of his voice itself reassuring, comforting. No matter how bad the news, when Paul Harvey told it, you knew that somehow things were going to be alright. It was not Pollyannaish, not at all. It grew out of his deep gratitude for this nation, his deep commitment to its best and highest values, and his confidence that when those values were allowed to guide the ship of state, all indeed will be well. That confidence—and his integrity—led him to take controversial stands on occasion that contradicted and offended many of his strongest constituents and listeners. "Mr. President, I love you but you're wrong," he said to President Nixon at a central point in the Vietnam War. He argued for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and for reproductive choice—positions that did not endear him to many of his friends and allies.

It was that integrity that was so important about him and prompted millions—even those who did not agree with a particular opinion or position—to respect Paul Harvey and to listen to him.

He also had a sense of the significance of the ordinary. It's a great American literary tradition—also practiced by Mark Twain, Garrison Keillor—that of seeing the humor in the daily stuff of life, but also the heroic and sometimes the holy. Common, ordinary people were interesting, Paul Harvey thought, fascinating, worth our attention and our respect. As we listened to him tell one of his famous stories, we simply felt a little better about the human condition, human potential.

He was a man of faith. I received a message Thursday from the International Fire Fighters, Police, and Emergency Medical Services

Chaplains Ministry. They interviewed Mr. Harvey, and he told them about his faith and personal religious experience. He told how John 3:16 became the heart and soul of his faith. He candidly reported how he asked for God's advice and when he got it argued back a bit. "Oh no, God, you don't understand. . . . That isn't the way it is supposed to be at all." As I read that, it occurred to me that it is an honest reflection of the reality many, if not most, of us have experienced, only Paul Harvey had the integrity to name it.

Then, he said, he allowed God to become the determiner, the major stockholder in the enterprise.

He said, "I pray daily that I'll measure up to the awesomeness of the responsibilities I have. It is not that this absolves me of personal responsibility, but at least it puts my work in Higher Hands . . . much more reliable than my own."

"My desire," he told the chaplains, "is to be a more worthy disciple, to be a more proper manifestation of the Holy Spirit in my life."

His long and loving marriage to Angel was a model, a testimony to lifelong kindness, commitment, grace, and love.

They came here, to this church, to renew their wedding vows in a private ceremony. And Mrs. Harvey made a very generous gift, which provided a beautiful new exterior lighting system to illuminate this church building. She gave it in memory of her sister, who is memorialized in a dedicating plaque at the southeast Narthex entrance.

Paul Harvey saw significance in the everyday, mundane, ordinary stuff of human life because he believed individual human beings were not only interesting, but important, sacred even.

At the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Christian faith is the conviction that each human life bears the image of the Creator, that each one of us is a reflection of the deepest mystery of human existence, that each of us is a child of God.

We believe that life is precious and holy and full of potential precisely because it derives from God. And we believe that how we live life, how we use the gift, is ultimately the way each of us affirms our faith. God is pleased, I believe, when life is fully lived, when life is given away and poured out for others, when the cup is drained to the last drop, nothing withheld.

Faith believes that the one who gave us the gift, knows us, loves us, cares about us, walks with us.

Even in the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.

We don't know what prompted the psalmist to write those words. Perhaps he had lost someone dear. Perhaps his beloved nation had suffered a crushing defeat. Perhaps he was in exile, far from home and family.

Whatever it was, we know that he stood where we must stand on occasion, in some dark valley. And so we hold tightly to the hope in his beloved words:

Even in the valley I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.

That is the hope shared by all of us.

And then in Bethlehem of Judea a child was born, a child Christian faith believes was God's love come to live among us, to seal the promise, to free us from fear, to create in our hearts laughter and joy and hope and conviction and determination and the beautiful human impulse to love one another.

The child grew, became a man, lived and died, showing God's great love. Faith believes death did not defeat him; faith knows that love is stronger than death.

And so a few years after his death and resurrection, one of his followers, Paul, could ask, "Who can separate us from the love of God?" and answer confidently, "Nothing. Nothing in life or death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thanks be to God for the gift of life.

Thanks be to God for the life of Paul Harvey.

Thanks be to God for the good news of a love from which nothing can separate us.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.